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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ ISPs Attack Zombies! ~ People Are Talking! ~ AOL Spam Scheme!

~ Induce Act Criticized! ~ Anti-Spyware Bill OK! ~ CCAG 2004 Classics!
~ Utah Spyware Law Block ~ Russian Whizkid Busted ~ ASCII Pioneer Dies
~ Maine Embraces Laptops ~ Comdex 2004 Cancelled! ~ eBay Apologizes!

-* RIAA Sue More Music Swappers *-
-* Classic Video Games Make A Comeback *-
-* Hotmail and Yahoo Step Up Mailbox Rivalry! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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What another gorgeous week it was around here in New England! I know that many New Englanders and vacationers to this area really enjoy hot, typical beach weather. But for me, give me temperatures in the 60's and 70's and I'm more than happy. Drop in an occasional 80-degree reading with no humidity, and I can handle that too. Just perfect weather for getting out and not having to worry about melting under the sweltering heat.

It's hard to believe, but the Fourth of July long holiday weekend is rapidly approaching. The Spring season just seemed to fly by! At least I have most of my outdoor projects completed already. Hopefully, our neighborhood will be celebrating another annual block party over the holiday weekend. It's a great way to meet some of the neighbors, and get to know others better. I hope that this year's event has cooler weather; the past couple of years has been downright hot!

I've been reading a lot of articles lately describing how the "retro" look is making a comeback, with regard to video gaming. A lot of the classic Atari games continue to get more and more headlines, and re-made for the newer systems, including peecees. I'm just waiting for the day when the classic computers start to make a comeback somehow. It's probably not too likely to take a fast hold if it occurs because of the lack of speed with the classic machines, but it would be nice if the classics could regain a small niche comeback somehow. We'll never take the place of today's computer technology, but some of us manage to use both side-by-side on a regular basis, and enjoy the comforts of both worlds. But wouldn't it something if an Atari computer were to come out soon with current processor speeds, storage capabilities, and peripherals - had plenty of developer support - and yet still had the same look and feel as our almost 20-year old machines! Imagine running Dungeon Master or PageStream on a new blazing fast Falcon 2004 with enhanced Atari graphics and sound! Well, we can always dream, I guess.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

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CCAG 2004 Classics Show

Dear Classic Computer and Gaming Enthusiast,

The Classic Computer and Gaming Show committee is pleased to announce that CCAG 2004 is scheduled for the 23rd of October from 4:30 P.M. until 10:30 P.M. at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 5885 Hopkins Road, Mentor, Ohio. This year's gathering is FREE to all who attend. (There is a strict limit on dealer space. First come. First served.)

More info is available on the website, www.ccagshow.com. The website will be updated every weekend so that Monday morning, you'll be able to tune in to the latest.

And don't forget to spread the word! We spent the advertising budget on the hall. Good choice if'n you ask me.

~ Thomas McLaren
Webmaster

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Yet another week has come and gone and, yes, it's time to take a look at what's going on in the NewsGroups again.

Before we do, I want to relate a little happening to you...

While cleaning out some old computer stuff at work the other day, I found a real relic from the "golden days" of Atari computing.

Back 'in the day', we used 1040s in the shop for everything. The main problem with STs in a business setting, as you may know, was that networking was almost unheard of.

I, being the computer-savvy guy that I was (I had a 1200 baud modem and EVERYTHING! <G>), searched for anything that would allow us to network STs. While we eventually settled on LANtech cartridges, there were many other stops along the way that turned out to be less than optimum. I tried everything from RS-232 transfers to MIDI-net. One of the options that was _almost_ what we needed was a product called SGS-Net. SGS-Net was basically a MIDInet adaptor that transferred over a coax cable. Maximum distance was good, error checking was reliable, and the setup was simple. The problem was transmission speed. It may have been the fast by most standards at the time, but the database (a dbase clone) of

about 500 Kbytes took... well, let's say that it took more than a few minutes to load over the network.

Anyway, I found one of the SGSnet boxes the other day. That's right... just ONE. I took the opportunity to do something that I hadn't the nerve to do back then... I took the sucker apart.

I've got to tell you that I was a bit disappointed. Inside was a circuit board that simply made wire connections easier. No ICs, no diodes, no capacitors, no nothing. Well, whatever works. I don't remember much about the software anymore, but I seem to remember that there was no provision for any kind of file or record locking, and that the SGSnet boxes themselves kept getting in the way on my desk.

As I said, we finally settled on LANtech cartridges, which also used coaxial cable, but connected through the cartridge port and sported a much faster transfer rate. As an added benefit, I was also able to set up a simple file locking scheme that actually worked! Yeah, it was a lot of work... or would be considered a lot of work today in this age of plug 'n play Microsoft moderated compu-correctness, but it had one advantage that you see less and less of these days... I actually learned something.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'kryten droid' asks about resurrecting and archiving Atari-specific disks and data:

"I found my PC can't read most Atari disks of course.
No doubt some of them are copy-protected (laser destroyed sectors?) and will need the duff-sector information preserving.
He paid for them so I reckon he is entitled to put the data on a different storage medium.

Writing a PC program to read them looks laborious but would read disks pretty fast. The alternative is writing utilities to transfer files over the serial port: slow but surer to read the data using the Atari disk drive.

I had a look at the ST parallel port for faster laplink style transfers, but it does not have enough handshaking signals.

Anyone got any helpful suggestions?"

Rory McMahon tells droid:

"For the Atari 8 bit disks, a PC running APE (http://www.atarimax.com) and the ape and pro cables would work for most disks. Copy protected ones may be a little more difficult, however, checking the internet for these disks already in .ATR or .PRO disk image format is advised. After you get them on the PC, just burn them.

For the ST side, disk utilities such as MSA archiver or ZIPping non protected disks will get them ready for moving to a PC. I've used the

PARCP (http://joy.sophics.cz/parcp/) parallel port cable method and it works great. I've used it from transferring from my falcon to the PC. Then just burn them on the PC.

Both APE and PARCP are excellent shareware programs. You could also put together an Ethernec (http://hardware.atari.org/ether/index.htm) adapter for the ST.

Either case, you will run into disks that may not be able to copy. Hopefully you will be able to find disk images on the internet, or just keep the disk and reduce the amount of disks you keep. After you burn them, donate them to a local Atari Users Group or sell them online."

Brian Roland adds his own thoughts:

"I recommend disk imaging utilities on the ST end.
Make an image for each disk with the ST then either burn the CD from the ST or move it to some other machine for the burn. Options to get it from one to the other....

If his ST has a host that hooks up to a true SCSI drive, and your PC has a SCSI host.......you could use GEM Explorer on a PC to grab the images from the ST hard drive. With HDDriver you could use a DOS or BGM/DOS partitioned hard disk to move things across. I.E. I use an old ZIP drive for this purpose, using a special format that looks like DOS to a PC and BGM to an Atari.

Ethernet is also an option.

Serial ports with a null modem cable and your favorite terminal protocol matched at each end (such as Zmodem) also work. The ST isn't likely to lock with anything over 19200 baud, but it will get the job done.

You might also consider a Catweasel floppy controller for your PC. It was really designed for those 800k Amiga disks, but the controller comes in handy for lots of formats that your typical PC floppy controller just can not handle.

I'm not sure what software comes with it...never owned one....but it might be worth a web search to find out. If there is 'tracker' copying software with it, it just might be ideal."

'Skyblasc' asks about an STE that happens to be sound-challenged:

I've recently acquired an ATARI STe, bundled with a B/W Hi-Res monitor.

The computer boots OK and disk drive is fully functional. Monitor also works fine.

BUT... I downloaded Cubase-Lite for testing the sound capabilities of the STe and loaded the demo song packed with Cubase-Lite, and the piece was going on but with no sound.

I tried turning up the volume in the monitor, and also tried the RCA sound outputs at the back of the STe but then again, no sound.

Is there any way to test if sound chips are OK? I'm thinking of some kind of test-software or something, just to discard broken music chip."

Brian Roland explains:

"CuBase Lite is a MIDI sequencer....it does not make sounds unless you hook a MIDI tone generator to the MIDI ports.

To make music using the ST sound chip, or with 8bit samples internally (or both) you'd do better with a tracker that builds MOD files, or something similar.

Right this moment, my brain can only think of a package called Quartet that does this. There was something by Activision called STudio I believe which also works nicely on an ST. Many others are out there! When my mind isn't so foggy I'll come back and offer some links for the topic. Meanwhile, you can test your ST sound with some free demos or games. I doubt the sound is broken."

Steve Sweet adds:

"You could check the general ACC /CPX to make sure that the sound is not just muted. Do you get a beep when you press a keyboard key?"

Skyblasc tells Brian and Steve:

"I'm more used to AY music chips from 8bits computers, so I though that if Cubase is the great software everyone says it is, it would be my first choice to test sound on my new STe. And of course I was thinking it used the internal STe sound chips."

Chris Murray asks for a refresher course on his old ST:

"I used to have an Atari, about 8-9 years ago, and it was my main computer (until the family picked up a PC, then I managed to get one too). I first bought a 520 STfm, but soon had the chance to pick up a modified STe, which was supposed to be 1040. I've just dug the Atari out of the attic, and it boots up (which is a good sign), but I'm curious to know what exactly I am using. Is there any way, barring examining the case, to tell what I have hardware wise?

Also, is there any sites regarding upgrades? I want to hopefully do up my dear ST, at least give it a facelift or such.

Also, has there been anyone who's put an ST into a case, ala mega ST? I've seen on ebay a spare keyboard part, and the mainboard + powerboard, and was wondering if I could convert it into a mini PC style.

Thanks, and sorry if the questions seem noobish."

Ian McCall tells Chris:

"I've recently done the same thing - bought an STe from ebay. There's an app called WhichST, but I can't find it online anywhere. I'll have a look and see if I can find a link for you."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Classic Games Make A Comeback!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" New ’Dragon Ball Z’!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Classic Video Games Make a Comeback

When Rob O’Hara needs a serious video game fix, he unwinds a black rubber joystick and plays a few rounds of "Space Invaders" on his Atari 2600, vintage 1982.

The 30-year-old networking engineer owns newer Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube consoles, but for a true gaming geek like O’Hara, nothing tops the blocky graphics and simple sound effects of retro video games.

"Playing games was a big part of my childhood," says the Yukon, Okla. man. "Back then, it seems like games were more family-oriented, and as a result, families ended up playing a lot of games together."

O’Hara is no relic in his love of 1980s electronic nostalgia.

Vintage consoles are plentiful on Internet auction sites. An annual "Classic Gaming Expo" convention is growing, moving to larger quarters this year. And companies are trying to cash in with repackaged editions of classics including the space fighter "Defender" and the pill-munching "Pac-Man."

Nintendo Co. recently released eight classic games for its portable Game Boy Advance, including "Super Mario Bros.," "The Legend of Zelda," and "Excitebike." Along with the $20-apiece games, the company also released a $100 Game Boy Advance system styled after its original Nintendo Entertainment System.

Jakks Pacific, meanwhile, sells a line of retro video game systems from

classic game companies like Atari, Namco, Capcom and Activision. The $20 battery-powered systems, first released two years ago, plug directly into televisions and resemble old-fashioned joysticks.

"Games like Pac-Man are still as compelling today as they were 30 years ago," said spokeswoman Genna Goldberg of the Malibu, Calif.-based company. "There is a big nostalgia value."

Retro video gaming has become something of a pop culture phenomenon lately, with video game music and themes featured in television commercials for Hummer and Saturn sport utility vehicles. A top 20 R&B hit, "Game Over (Flip)" by Lil' Flip features sound effects from "Pac-Man."

It's not just nostalgia that's fueling retro video interest, says O'Hara. He thinks the old games were simply more fun to play: "There's a phrase that's used a lot in marketing - 'easy to learn, hard to master' - that describes most classic video games."

Gamers itching to relive their Atari, Colecovision and Intellivision days can find plenty of systems for about $20 on Internet auction sites like eBay. Many video game stores sell refurbished models for a bit more, about $80.

You can even travel to game as a group.

Last year's Classic Gaming Expo drew over 1,400 attendees, and this year the August event is moving from Las Vegas to the convention center in San Jose, Calif., to accommodate larger crowds.

Expo spokesman Jayson Hill says there's a whole generation of older gamers who trashed their systems when they were kids. Now, they're feeling nostalgic and have some money to spend.

"There was a time when you could walk into any thrift store and pick up a game cartridge for 50 cents and systems for a couple of dollars," Hill said. "Those days are gone."

Many who go back and play the older games are often surprised, however, at the crudeness of the graphics, said Steven L. Kent, author of "The Ultimate History of Video Games."

The 1982 game "River Raid" is a good example, he said. Players fly a fighter jet over a river filled with ships and barges but "when you go back, you see that the river was a blue rectangle with lots of gray rectangles for boats."

"A lot of people look back on old games like a kind of Camelot. Only when you do, you see that the castle smelled, the food was rancid and the maidens were bloated."

Atari Delivers 'Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors'

"The DBZ franchise has established itself as one of the premier fighting franchises and we are proud to continue offering experiences that capture the essence of the property," said Nancy MacIntyre, vice president of Marketing for Atari's Beverly Studio. "With Supersonic Warriors, Atari goes a step further in the recreation of the animated series by adding aerial

maneuvers and in-flight battles to an existing foundation of enticing gameplay, authentic characters and deep storylines."

Developed by Banpresto, Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors combines traditional 2-D fighting with free-flight, aerial combat and allows players to assume the roles of 15 characters from the TV series including Goku, Vegeta, Cell, Frieza and Buu. Players can engage in massive tag team battles and experience the DBZ saga in an all-new way - complete with alternate endings to famous DBZ storylines. With intense brawls, thrilling flight mode and unforgettable characters, Supersonic Warriors offers fans a chance to take the challenging action of DBZ everywhere they go.

Rated 'T' for Teen, Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors is available for Game Boy Advance at a suggested retail price of $29.99.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Hotmail, Yahoo Step Up The Mailbox Rivalry

The Web mailbox wars escalated last week when Yahoo expanded its free e-mail accounts from 4 megabytes to 100 MB, and Microsoft confirmed that it, too, will raise storage limits soon on its free Hotmail accounts.

Both are reacting to Google's plan to offer 1 gigabyte of free storage with its new Gmail service, which is still in trial form with a limited number of users.

"What we are trying to do is take storage off the table as an issue," said Brad Garlinghouse, a Yahoo vice president.

Just a few months ago, Yahoo charged $60 a year for 100 MB of storage. Starting last Tuesday, that much storage comes free with every account (and the maximum size of any one attached file is now 10 MB instead of 3 MB). The company also consolidated its various extra-cost mail services into one $20-per-year plan, with no graphical ads and with a hefty 2 GB of mail storage.

That's twice what Google is planning. Yahoo said its paid version contains more features than Gmail, including tighter spam filtering and the ability to download messages with standard e-mail programs.

Yahoo also streamlined its mail service's interface and search features.

Microsoft, meanwhile, has quietly been expanding the storage it offers to at least some users of its free Hotmail service to 25 megabytes, up from the 2 that were available before. Users of these expanded accounts can buy still more room with two new "extra storage" plans: a $40-per-year service that includes 50 MB, and a $60-per-year option that allows 100 MB.

But other users continue to get only 2 MB of storage, and an "All About Hotmail" page at the site shows the old amount as well. A new account opened on Friday afternoon also was limited to 2 MB.

Microsoft spokeswoman Kathleen Callaghan said she had not heard of any free accounts getting more storage.

But she did confirm that the company has plans in the works to beef up Hotmail: "Part of that will ensure that storage won't be an issue," she said. And a Microsoft vice president, Yusuf Mehdi, said last week that users will see a ton of innovation from Hotmail and Microsoft's other communication services over the next year.

UPS has cut a deal with an eBay consignment service, AuctionDrop. People can drop off items they want sold on the Internet's biggest flea market at any UPS store and UPS will ship the item to AuctionDrop, which will then photograph and offer it for sale on eBay. Sellers pay no shipping costs and get the item back if it doesn't sell.

But if it does sell, AuctionDrop and eBay take a big bite out of the proceeds before the owner gets a check in the mail: AuctionDrop charges 38 percent of the first $200, or a minimum of $20, plus declining percentages on amounts over $200. EBay charges 5.25 percent of the first $25 and declining percentages for amounts over $25.

Hundreds More Sued Over Music File Swaps

The music industry filed copyright infringement lawsuits against 482 computer users Tuesday, the latest round of litigation by recording companies against suspected online music file-swappers.

The cases were filed against 213 people in St. Louis, 206 in Washington D.C., 55 in Denver and six in New Jersey, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, the Washington-based trade group that represents the major recording companies.

As in previous complaints brought by the industry this year, the lawsuits were filed against unnamed "John Doe" defendants, identified only by their computers' Internet protocol addresses.

The tactic is used when the defendants' identities are not known because it allows plaintiffs to ask the court to subpoena Internet access providers to reveal the names of their customers.

"Illegal downloading continues to cause enormous harm to the entire music community," said Steven Marks, the RIAA's general counsel. "We must stay on the path of education, enforcement, and offering great legal services."

In all, a total of 3,429 people have been sued by the recording industry since its legal campaign against individual computer users began in September. At least 600 of those cases were eventually settled for roughly $3,000 each. None of the cases has yet gone to trial.

The recording industry blames lagging music sales in recent years on the rise of online music piracy.

While some surveys have shown the number of people engaging in file-sharing

has declined since the RIAA began its legal assault, other data shows millions continue to share music, movies and software online.

File-Sharing Bill Provokes Wrath

A storm of criticism has broken out following Wednesday's introduction of the "Inducing Infringement of Copyrights Act" in the U.S. Senate by Republican senator Orrin Hatch. This legislation, which is being backed by both Republicans and Democrats, aims to overrule last year's decision by a Los Angeles federal court on the legality of peer-to-peer (P2P) networks.

The Los Angeles court ruled that using P2P networks Grokster and Morpheus to download copyrighted content without paying for it was illegal but that the networks themselves were legally entitled to operate. A panel of federal appeal court judges currently is considering that ruling.

The new legislation (dubbed the "Induce Act") proposed by Senator Hatch, who is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, makes the designers and distributors of P2P software legally liable for the copyright infringement that occurs through use of their product.

Senator Hatch's legislation is being criticized by file-sharing networks and by tech-industry groups, which claim it could hinder development of new technologies and infringe Americans' democratic rights. Organizations that have issued statements criticizing the legislation include the Electronic Frontier Foundation; P2P United, a group representing the file-sharing industry; technology policy group Public Knowledge; and the Computer and Communications Industry Association.

"P2P United respects the legal process," Adam Eisgrau, executive director of P2P United, whose members include Morpheus, Grokster and BearShare, told NewsFactor. "A federal district judge ruled last year that providing a P2P network is legal. Now, new legislation has been prepared in the dark of night that will stifle innovation.

"No developer of any information technology that could be abused without the developer's consent is safe from civil or criminal prosecution if this new legislation is passed." Eisgrau said. The legislation could harm the free flow of information, which is a democratic right, he added.

A key element in Senator Hatch's justification for his legislation is the need to protect children. "It is illegal and immoral to induce or encourage children to commit crimes," says Senator Hatch in a statement. "Tragically, some corporations now seem to think that they can legally profit by inducing children to steal," he added, comparing the developers of P2P networks to two fictional criminals, Fagin in Oliver Twist, and the "child-catcher" character in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

"Adults who corrupt or exploit the innocence of children are the worst type of villains. In Oliver Twist, Fagin and Bill Sikes profited by inducing children to steal," Senator Hatch said. "In the film Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang, the leering 'Child-Catcher' lured children into danger with false promises of 'free lollipops.' Tragically, some corporations now seem to think that they can legally profit by inducing children to steal - that they can legally lure children and others with false promises of 'free music.'"

The main article of law on which the new legislation is based is the concept of "secondary liability." Common to most systems of law, secondary liability notes that in the course of many criminal acts, the criminal actor shares culpability with a third party not directly involved in the act but who, through his own actions, has made the likelihood of a criminal occurrence more likely.

If Senator Hatch’s legislation is passed, the software developers will be held secondarily responsible for the illegal copying of copyrighted content by other individuals.

However, P2P technology is also used to distribute non-copyrighted technology, not just pirated material, in the same way that a photocopier can be used for legitimate copying as well as for piracy.

Judge Blocks Utah Law Banning Spyware

A judge has agreed to temporarily block enforcement of a Utah law that aims to ban so-called spyware.

The preliminary injunction remains in effect pending the outcome of a New York pop-up ad company’s challenge to the law’s constitutionality.

Third District Judge Joseph C. Fratto Jr. ruled Tuesday that WhenU.com Inc. proved that it would have sustained irreparable harm had the spyware law gone into effect.

WhenU provides users with free software like games and screen savers. The software comes with a separate program, SaveNow, that tracks Web traffic and matches a user’s surfing habits with particular advertisers.

Ads "pop up" when there’s a match. For example, a consumer browsing a travel site might be offered deals on hotels or rental cars, though that travel site has nothing to do with the ads.

The Utah law targets software that monitors computer users’ Internet activity and sends that information elsewhere, in many cases without users’ knowledge or consent. The law also seeks to curb pop-up advertisements, penalizing ads that obstruct Web pages at $10,000 per violation.

WhenU maintains that its advertising software, which is used by 21 million people each month, is only installed on computers with users’ consent and does not gather private information.

"Spyware is a problem and we want to put an end to it," said Avi Naider, chief executive of WhenU. "WhenU supports appropriate anti-spyware legislation at the federal level, but unfortunately Utah’s Act also impairs legitimate Internet advertising."

WhenU attorney Celia Barenholtz said the costs of complying with the law would be "incalculable."

State attorneys contend computer users often are tricked into accepting such software or are not fully informed of how it affects their computers.

Anti-Spyware Bill Advances in Congress

A U.S. congressional committee on Thursday approved a bill designed to crack down on deceptive "spyware" that hides in users' computers and secretly monitors their activities.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee voted 45-4 for a bill that would require software makers to notify people before loading new programs on their machines that collect information about them.

Spyware can sap computing power, crash machines and bury users under a blizzard of unwanted ads. It can capture passwords, credit-card numbers and other sensitive data.

Several states have passed or are considering anti-spyware legislation, and business groups have called for a national law to avoid conflicts.

The bill introduced by California Republican Rep. Mary Bono and New York Democratic Rep. Ed Towns would allow the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to seek millions of dollars in fines for some of the practices lawmakers consider most egregious, such as logging users' keystrokes or stealing their identities.

It also would require that spyware be made easily removable.

Several Democrats said the bill was moving too quickly, noting the version approved by the committee was not made available until after midnight the night before.

California Democratic Rep. Anna Eshoo, whose Silicon Valley district is home to many high-tech companies, said she was concerned the bill could hinder legitimate surveillance, such as eBay Inc.'s efforts to catch auction fraud.

"I just don't think that there's been sufficient opportunity to consider the implications of this bill," Eshoo said.

Backers said they had tweaked the bill to address concerns of high-tech companies and would be open to further modifications before it comes up for a vote on the House floor.

"This bill has been open more than many, many bills I've seen," said Florida Republican Rep. Cliff Stearns, whose consumer-protection subcommittee approved the legislation last month.

A spyware bill has been introduced in the Senate, but lawmakers have not yet taken it up for a vote.

Separately on Thursday, lawmakers on the House Judiciary Committee introduced a bill that would establish prison sentences of up to five years for those who use spyware to commit identity theft or other crimes.

That measure could be folded into the Commerce Committee's bill or advanced on its own, staffers said.

EBay Apologizes Over Search, Billing Issues

Online marketplace operator eBay Inc. on Friday apologized to users for billing system glitches and a change in its search technology that have hit some sellers in the pocketbook.

EBay sellers have been most vocal about the billing snafus that struck an undisclosed subset of eBay users when the company switched to a new system in April.

While eBay has fixed the original double-billing problem, it is still working to clear out remaining issues as some sellers continue to wait for credits and complain that their monthly invoices carry incorrect totals, an executive said.

"We let you down and we're sorry. We're working feverishly to get this right, and we will get this right," Jeff Jordan, eBay's general manager of U.S. operations, said during the keynote address at eBay Live, the company's annual seller conference.

Jordan also said the company was slowing down its transition to a new browsing technology aimed at helping eBay shoppers more quickly zone in on listings. While it has been successful in the apparel and tickets categories, he said it had been "controversial" among sellers of such items as books.

The comments came as some 10,000 eBay sellers gathered in New Orleans for the company's conference, an annual gathering that features marketing seminars and other events.

Leslie and Ken Linzer, who run Pro-Traders and do about $30,000 in annual business, said the Ebay change caused bids on listings for their art books and vintage art catalogs to dry up, but had no impact on their vintage postcard sales.

"The average consumer doesn't know what to call things sometimes," said Leslie Linzer, adding that when sellers and buyers define things differently under the new search system, auctions do not come up readily for viewing.

Denis Burger, of Portland, Oregon-based Bid Brothers, said he heard users complain about the search changes and billing errors, but had experienced none first hand.

"People seem to be finding our auctions just fine. We list in all kinds of categories," said Burger, who operates a drop-off store that does eBay selling for a fee.

Despite the glitches, eBay sellers interviewed said they were mostly satisfied with the Silicon Valley-based company and its ability to connect buyers and sellers on the Internet (news - web sites).

Many are lured by the dream of leaving their day jobs and joining the roughly 430,000 U.S. sellers who make their living on eBay. "It's a hobby we make money at," said Ken Linzer, who added that eBay selling is a "very-item specific business" with some areas more prone to growth.

"But it's not giving up the day job just yet," added Leslie Linzer, his wife and eBay business partner. Sellers said that many newcomers fail to realize how quickly costs - from listing and payment transaction fees to shipping, storage and incidentals - can erode profits.

"It’s the little holes in your purse that can make you broke," said Wright.

Two Men Are Charged in AOL Spam Scheme

An America Online software engineer stole a list of 92 million customer screen names that was eventually used to send massive amounts of e-mail spam, federal prosecutors said Wednesday.

Jason Smathers, 24, was arrested at his home in Harpers Ferry, W.Va., and was charged with conspiracy.

Smathers, working at AOL offices in Dulles, Va., stole the list and sold it to a Las Vegas man, Sean Dunaway, who used it to promote an Internet gambling operation and sold it to spammers, a criminal complaint said.

Dunaway, 21, also was arrested at his home and was charged with conspiracy.

Lawyers for the men were not immediately available to comment, but prosecutors in New York said both were to appear in federal courts near their homes Wednesday - Smathers in Virginia and Dunaway in Las Vegas.

Each man could face up to five years in prison and at least $250,000 in fines if convicted.

Smathers was not authorized to have access to the screen name list, which is kept in Dulles, but used another employee’s access code last year to steal it, prosecutors said.

Smathers compiled a list that also included customer ZIP codes and credit card types, prosecutors said.

AOL said it did not appear that Smathers had gained access to credit card numbers, which the company keeps in a separate facility.

"We deeply regret what has taken place and are thoroughly reviewing and strengthening our internal procedures as a result of this investigation and arrest," AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said.

Graham said the company fired Smathers on Wednesday as the charges were filed.

Prosecutors did not immediately say how much they allege Dunaway paid Smathers for the list, but they said Dunaway later paid him $100,000 for an updated version of it.

Dunaway then offered the list to spammers, charging them $2,000 for lists containing names beginning with a single letter of the alphabet or $52,000 for the entire list, the complaint said.

At least one spammer used the list to send advertising for herbal penile enhancement pills, prosecutors said.

AOL, owned by Time Warner Inc., has about 32 million customers worldwide, Graham said. Many customers register several different screen names for family members or themselves.

David Kelley, the U.S. attorney for Manhattan, said the arrests were two of the first prosecutions under federal "can spam" legislation that took effect early this year.

Web Virus May Be Stealing Financial Data

A computer virus designed to steal valuable information like passwords spread Friday through a new technique that converted popular Web sites into virus transmitters.

Though the impact of the "Scob" outbreak was mild compared with recent infections like "Sasser" and "Blaster," security experts worried about its method of delivery.

With Scob, virus writers have discovered yet another way - beyond e-mail and network techniques - of distributing their malicious code.

Now that the exploit is out, it won’t be long before others adapt it for spamming and for launching broad attacks to cripple the Internet, said Alfred Huger, senior director of engineering at security company Symantec Corp.

The infection, first discovered by Microsoft Corp. on Thursday, appears to take advantage of three separate flaws with Microsoft products and can be difficult to detect.

Stephen Toulouse, a security program manager at Microsoft, said software updates to fix two of them had been released in April, but the third flaw was newly discovered and had no patch available yet.

He recommended that computer owners obtain the latest security updates for Microsoft products and their anti-virus and firewall programs. For the flaw that lacks a patch, he said, users should also turn up security settings on Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browsers to the highest levels.

Users could also turn off the "JavaScript" feature on their Microsoft browsers, though doing so could cripple functions on some sites.

The virus does not affect Macintosh versions of Internet Explorer, nor does it spread through non-Microsoft browsers like Mozilla and Opera.

Users can search their computers for the files "Kk32.dll" or "Surf.dat" to see if they are infected. Removal tools are available from major anti-virus vendors.

Experts said the infection was unusually broad but wasn’t substantially interfering with Internet traffic.

The U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team warned that any Web site, even those trusted by users, might be a vector for spreading the virus.

Security experts worked Friday to pin down how hackers managed to infect hundreds and possibly thousands of Web sites. It appears to target at least one recent version of Microsoft software for operating Web sites, called Internet Information Server.

Hackers made subtle changes to the Web site so visitors get a piece of code

that’s designed to retrieve, from a Russian Web site, software that records a person’s keystrokes.

Such data, which can include credit card numbers, bank accounts and passwords, are collected for remote delivery to hackers, experts say.

The virus, however, does not attempt to spread itself, helping to limit its effect.

Web sites have been used before to spread a form of spyware called "browser hijackers." One, known as Qhosts, disables access to major search engines and resets the Internet Explorer browser home page to a little-known site.

But those typically have involved "users having been visiting shady sites," Chris Kraft, senior security analyst at Sophos Inc. Here, hackers plant the code on business, government and other everyday sites they do not normally control.

"This is kind of ingenious," Kraft said.

Largest ISPs Attack ’Zombies’

The country’s largest e-mail account providers called yesterday for a worldwide industry assault on "zombies," personal computers that have been unwittingly commandeered by spammers and used to send out unwanted e-mail and malicious programs.

The Anti-Spam Technical Alliance, which includes America Online Inc., Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. and EarthLink Inc., urged all Internet providers to police their networks more aggressively and cut off machines suspected of being launching pads for spam.

By some estimates, hundreds of thousands of computers around the world have been infected with software that lets them be used without their owners’ knowledge. Such machines now account for as much as 40 percent of all spam.

Large Internet providers typically monitor traffic on their networks and pinpoint machines that are sending out inordinate amounts of e-mail. When such machines are found, some Internet providers block their Internet access until their owners come forward, at which point they are given help to remove the software code used by the spammers before being reconnected.

The zombie problem, said representatives of the group, is going largely unchecked because other Internet providers are not taking such action.

"We’re throwing the gauntlet down," said Ken Hickman, senior mail director at Yahoo. "We’re saying, ’Hey, secure your networks.’ "

The proposal suggests that Internet providers that are quarantining zombies might reject all mail from networks that are not doing so.

"If the ISP does not reasonably control abusive traffic, it is at risk of being blocked by other ISPs," said the group’s report.

"These machines are a security risk," added Brian Sullivan, senior technical director of mail operations at AOL.

Mike Jackman, executive director of the California ISP Association, responded that smaller Internet providers generally do watch their networks closely and act when they see zombies.

"They are doing it because it’s in their interest to do it," Jackman said. Spammers "are eating up bandwidth."

Jeffrey Sullivan, director of Verizon Communications Inc.’s Internet operations, said his company will not cut off a machine’s Internet access until it has contacted the account owner. He said Verizon participated in the group’s deliberations but is not a member.

The group, which also includes Comcast Corp. and British Telecom, said the industry should standardize several other practices, including making sure that spammers cannot automatically register for e-mail accounts without verifying their identities.

In addition, the group said, ISPs should not have servers - computers that process mail - that allow third parties to relay e-mail through them without being verified as legitimate account holders.

But the group was not yet ready with unified standards for verifying the identity of e-mail senders, which is one of the industry’s biggest initiatives.

The four largest ISPs have been testing systems for authenticating senders to make it more difficult for spammers to disguise their identities and locations.

The companies are working with Internet organizations that help develop technical specifications, and the process is likely to take until the end of the year.

In the meantime, the group urges ISPs to prevent people from sending mail until they have been deemed valid account holders. Usually, the report said, this can be done by requiring user names and passwords to be provided before users are allowed onto e-mail systems.

Anti-spam groups that have often been critical of ISPs for not being aggressive enough said the recommendations were hardly surprising.

"It’s a codification of existing best practices rather than anything that’s truly new," said John Mozena, executive director of the Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial Email.

He said that while unplugging zombies is important, the system still depends on voluntary compliance.

Mozena’s group and others have sought legislation to allow consumers to hold network owners accountable for permitting spam.

Court Convicts Obscene Text Messager

A teenager who sent an obscene text message to 15,000 cell-phone users has become the first computer whizkid in Russia to be convicted of sending "spam."

The unnamed university student from the Urals city of Chelyabinsk hacked into one of Russia's biggest mobile phone operators and used a special program to send the message, Interfax news agency said.

He was handed a one-year suspended sentence and ordered to pay a 3,000-rouble (around $100) fine.

A spokesman for the Section K branch of the Russian police which deals with hi-tech crimes said this was the first instance a spammer had been successfully prosecuted.

Russia has gained notoriety for its large number of talented and often disaffected young computer experts, whose bedrooms are regularly suspected of spawning major viruses.

Maine Schools Embracing Laptops As Tool

Maine's education commissioner has obtained assurances from at least 47 superintendents that they're ready to press forward with laptops in high schools this fall, giving her confidence that a deal can be struck with Apple Computer Corp.

Susan Gendron said the commitments bring her closer to the minimum level of 8,400 students and teachers necessary for Apple to rent laptops for $300 apiece per year, with training and other perks included.

And a spokesman said the show of support will bolster Gov. John Baldacci's case as he goes before the Legislature to press for full implementation of the laptop program in all 119 high schools.

"I'm very optimistic that we can move forward," Gendron said Wednesday from Bar Harbor, where she was meeting with superintendents.

For a while, it seemed that the statewide experiment with laptop computers would end in the seventh and eighth grades after lawmakers adjourned without providing funding to expand the program into high schools.

As it stood, students who'd grown accustomed to having laptops in middle schools would have to return to the reality of pencil and paper upon their arrival in the ninth grade this fall.

But the Education Department has been scrambling to find a way to move the laptops into at least some high schools this fall.

The arrangement the Education Department came up with involves signing up schools to meet Apple's minimum level of participation.

School districts could apply for money from a state renovation fund to install wireless networks for the laptops, and Gendron has suggested tapping federal grants as a way for school districts to avoid out-of-pocket costs this year.

The ultimate goal is for Baldacci to go back to the Legislature in January and use the endorsement from superintendents to press for full funding of laptops in all public high schools in 2005-06.

Gendron, who believes the program sets Maine apart from other states, is

eager to make that argument to lawmakers.

"This is a key to transformational change in our schools, and it’s a direct tie to the economic future of Maine. And if we’re going to continue to lead the country, then it’s essential to meet our vision of having a highly educated work force. The technology is the underpinning of all of that," she said.

Maine’s four-year program provided Apple iBook computers to more than 30,000 seventh- and eighth-graders in all 241 public middle schools across the state in two phases in 2002 and 2003.

It has received high marks from teachers, students and parents but comes at a time of tight budgets.

Baldacci will press for laptop funding even as he pushes to balance the budget and enact spending reforms next year, when lawmakers will be facing a $1 billion shortfall, said spokesman Lee Umphrey.

"We need to invest in people and laptops have proven to be a tool to upgrade the skills ... of our young people," he said.

The proposed four-year rental program that the state is pursuing for high schools would provide the same low rate negotiated for middle schools. But there’s no guarantee of state funding.

Some school districts are moving forward with a lease-purchase agreement independent of the state efforts. Those schools could opt into the state rental program at no charge.

At it stands, the 11th-hour efforts will come too late to get the wireless networks and computers in place by Labor Day.

But Gendron is optimistic that laptops could be delivered to participating school districts by mid-October.

Comdex Cancels November 2004 Convention

The venerable Comdex convention, which for nearly 25 years showcased the latest and greatest in high tech in Las Vegas every November, is canceling this year’s show after years of declining attendance and interest.

Show organizer MediaLive International Inc. described the cancelation as a "postponement" and said Wednesday that it had formed an advisory board to reshape the troubled event. The company also said the next Las Vegas show would take place in November 2005.

"We are anxious to work with the industry to build the best event," said Eric Faurot, Comdex’s general manager.

Originally called the Computer Dealers Exposition when it started in a Las Vegas ballroom in 1979, Comdex grew exponentially over the years as companies flocked to the desert city to announce their latest software, hardware and visions.

Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates has been a speaker since the earliest days, and it’s also attracted the CEOs of Sun Microsystems Inc. and

Hewlett-Packard Co., among others.

During the tech boom, Comdex lured more than 200,000 people and filled more than 1.2 million square feet of convention space.

But several companies - including Dell Inc., International Business Machines Corp. and Intel Corp. - stopped leasing exhibit space, depriving Comdex organizers of revenue. Instead, many rented suites at nearby hotels and hosted gatherings there.

When the tech bubble burst, Comdex attendance and exhibitors plunged, forcing the organizer - then Key3Media - into bankruptcy. The 2003 show was refocused to appeal to corporate buyers and sellers, not consumers and general gadgetry.

The 2003 show attracted about 40,000 technology buyers, 550 exhibitors and 900 reporters, according to MediaLive. Though Dell returned last year, other companies focused more attention to the massive Consumer Electronics Show, which takes place in Las Vegas each January.

The 2004 show was scheduled to open Nov. 14.

Comdex needs to update its format and show off technology rather than just show it, said Rob Enderle, principal analyst at the Enderle Group.

"The market has grown a lot more than the show was able to grow in the last three decades," he said. "Part of the reason for that limitation was this show remained pretty much stuck in the 80s in format and form."

He also said the show must stick to its information technology roots - something that was tried last year with limited success.

"They did get the buyers back. They just didn’t get enough of the sellers back, and that was going to be the problem again this year," he said.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority learned of the cancelation Wednesday, said spokeswoman Marina Nicola. MediaLive, which is privately held, declined to discuss how much it would lose as a result of the cancelation.

MediaLive, meanwhile, has formed an advisory board of technology company executives to determine how the show "can best meet the future needs of the industry," according to the statement.

"While we could still run a profitable Comdex this year, it does not benefit the industry to do so without broader support of the leading technology companies," said Robert W. Priest-Heck, MediaLive’s chief executive.

Computer Pioneer Bemer, Helped Build ASCII, Dies

Bob Bemer, a computer pioneer who helped develop the ASCII coding system and the technology that led to the "escape" key on keyboards, has died at the age of 84 after battling cancer, his caregiver said on Thursday.

Bemer died on Tuesday at his home near Possum Kingdom Lake, Texas, 120 miles west of Dallas.

He worked for several years for IBM Corp. in the late 1950s and 1960s, and it was there that he helped develop the American Standard Code for Information Interchange. ASCII is a format code used in most computers in the world that allows them to read text as a binary number.

Bemer is also credited with writing the computer sequence that allows for the "escape" command. The escape command was seen as a major innovation in computing because it allowed users to move backward or sideways in a program.

He won the Computer Pioneer Award in 2002 from the IEEE Computer Society for his work in making it easier for people to move text and images on a computer screen.

"Computer power is work power, but it is also knowledge power, of the kind that has been used throughout history for aggrandizement as well as the good of the people," Bemer wrote on his Web site.

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